Sharing the Holy Land: Islamic Pilgrimage to Christian Holy Sites in Jerusalem during the Late Medieval and Early Modern Periods

Fadi Ragheb

Abstract

The Holy Land was the destination for many Muslim pilgrims during the late medieval and early modern period. In addition to worshipping in Jerusalem’s Haram al-Sharif, Muslim pilgrims in the Holy Land also visited important Christian holy sites, such as the Mount of Olives, the Tomb of the Virgin Mary, the Church of the Ascension, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. With a genre of medieval Islamic pilgrimage texts known as *Fada’il al-Quds* (Merits of Jerusalem) serving as their guide, Muslims visited these places and joined Christian worshippers in contemplating the sacred. *Fada’il al-Quds* texts informed Muslim pilgrims of the blessings (*fada’il*) of Christian holy sites by citing Islamic traditions, such as Qur’anic verses, hadith literature, and Companions’ sayings (*athar*), to sanctify each Christian site and to command Muslims to perform certain Islamic prayers and rituals there. Despite the debate on the legality of Muslim pilgrimage to churches and protestations against the practice by some conservative ‘ulama’, the *Fada’il al-Quds* corpus, along with travelogue literature, reveals that Muslims increasingly visited churches, shared sacred spaces, and even participated in Christian ceremonies into the Ottoman period. Using *Fada’il al-Quds* and travelogue literature from the medieval and early modern period, this study demonstrates that Muslims in the Holy Land shared sacred spaces with Christians in Jerusalem for centuries before the onset of the modern era.
The Holy Land was the destination of many Muslim pilgrims and travelers during the late medieval and early modern period. Seeking the blessings of Bayt al-Maqdis, many ‘ulama’ (religious scholars), Sufi mystics, and everyday pilgrims visited Jerusalem and contemplated the sacred at its many Muslim holy sites. During their pilgrimage itinerary, Muslims visited the Haram al-Sharif compound, the Muslim epicenter in Jerusalem, and its plethora of holy places there, including many important spots in the Dome of the Rock, al-Aqsa Mosque, and other sites located on the sacred esplanade (see figure 1). Intriguingly, while visiting the Holy Land, medieval Muslim pilgrims also visited Christian holy places, such as the Mount of Olives, the Tomb of the Virgin Mary, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and Bethlehem’s Church of the Nativity, where they sometimes performed Islamic rituals and contemplated the sacredness of figures holy in both Islam and Christianity.

During these medieval pilgrimage tours of Jerusalem, Muslims visiting the city’s sacred confines were directed by the Fada’il al-Quds texts, the pilgrimage guides composed to lead Muslims around the Bayt al-Maqdis’s labyrinth of holy sites. These Fada’il al-Quds works also instructed medieval Muslim pilgrims regarding the sanctification rituals associated with each spot, including Christian churches and sacred spaces. Indeed, many of the traditions in the corpus inform Muslims of the blessings (fada’il, sing. fadila) of certain Christian places in the Holy Land. The Fada’il al-Quds traditions extol these Christian sites by citing Qur’anic verses, hadith literature, the sayings of early generations of Muslims (athar), eschatological traditions, and biblical narratives connected to them.

On the other hand, some traditions in the Fada’il al-Quds genre went against the sanctification of churches. They forbade Muslims from visiting these non-Islamic places. Some traditions, for example, warned against the multiplication of sins in churches, while other precepts, authored mainly by Sunni Hanbali scholars, forbade Muslims from visiting Christian sacred spots altogether. Yet interestingly, late-medieval Fada’il al-Quds texts also began to debate whether Muslims should enter churches in Jerusalem. For example, Sunni Shafi’i authors writing in the post-Crusades Mamluk period (1250–1517/648–923 AH) addressed the legality of a Muslim’s visit and prayer in a church, and the conditions needed to render such an action permissible. They opined on and judged the practice, with some Shafi’i authors, as this study will reveal, permitting the practice as long as certain conditions were met and satisfied.
The Fada’il al-Quds corpus thus reveals a rich reservoir of traditions both sanctifying and downplaying Christian sites in the Holy Land. It points to a complex religiohistorical phenomenon of Muslims and Christians sharing sacred spaces in Jerusalem and Palestine, a practice that was also evident in Greater Syria and the wider Mediterranean during the pre-modern period. Therefore, a close examination of the Fada’il al-Quds literature discloses and delineates the Christian sacred sites visited by medieval Muslim pilgrims in the holy city and the sanctification and incorporation of these sites within the Islamic landscape. After providing a short overview of the Fada’il al-Quds literature, this essay explores which Christian holy sites were extolled and visited by Muslims according to these texts; how these Christian holy sites were incorporated into the medieval Islamic heritage; and what rituals Muslims performed there. Finally, it analyzes how the debate on whether Muslims were allowed to visit and enter churches changed across time and according to Sunni madhhab (a school of Islamic jurisprudence), comparing texts composed before the Crusades with those written during and after the Crusades, up to and including the early modern Ottoman period. The study will thus demonstrate how, paradoxically, as a result of authors
incorporating the debate on the legality of entering churches into the Fada’il al-Quds, Muslims increasingly began to visit churches and even participate in Christian ceremonies for centuries before the onset of the modern period.

Fada’il al-Quds: A Brief Description and Historical Survey

Fada’il al-Quds, or “Merits of Jerusalem,” are a corpus of religiohistorical texts composed during the medieval and early modern period to extol the sanctity of Jerusalem in Islam. These texts include Islamic traditions from the Qur’an, hadith, *athar*, and End of Days eschatology, together with biblical material, such as narratives of the biblical prophets (*qisas al-anbiya’*) and ancient Israelite accounts (*isra’iliyyat*), that describe the city, its central religious role in the monotheistic faiths, and its ancient past. They also include reports from chroniclers and geographers on the history of Jerusalem under early Muslim rule and, in some late-medieval works dating from the Mamluk period, the history of the city during the Crusades.

The main purpose of Fada’il al-Quds texts is to inform the reader of the religious merits of the city in the Islamic tradition. Naturally, accounts of the Prophet’s nocturnal journey to Jerusalem (*al-isra’*) and his ascension to the Heavens from the city (*al-mi’raj*) feature prominently. Fada’il al-Quds works also offer historical reports on the history of Jerusalem’s conquest by the second caliph, ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab, and the building of the Dome of the Rock by the seventh century Umayyad caliph ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan (r. 685–705/65–86 AH), thus serving as an important source for the early history of medieval Islamic Jerusalem. The corpus also stresses the city’s role in the End of Days and, importantly, the more quotidian aspects of Jerusalem’s sacredness, such as the spiritual reward of visiting, praying, fasting, living, and dying in Jerusalem.

Although Fada’il texts on cities such as Mecca and Medina were composed early in Islamic history, the collection and writing of complete Fada’il works on Jerusalem appeared relatively later. While individual Fada’il traditions on Jerusalem circulated as early as the late seventh to early eighth century CE (late first to early second century AH), the first collection only appeared during the ninth century (third century AH). Indeed, the earliest Fada’il al-Quds text is attributed to al-Walid ibn Hammad al-Ramli (d. ca. 912/300 AH), although there are no surviving manuscripts of this work. However, two major Fada’il al-Quds treatises were produced in the eleventh century by scholars from Jerusalem: *Fada’il al-Bayt al-Muqaddas* (The merits of Jerusalem), composed not later than 1019–1020 (410 AH) by Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Wasiti, and shortly later *Fada’il Bayt al-Maqdis wa-al-Khalil wa fada’il al-Sham* (The merits of Jerusalem and Hebron and the merits of Greater Syria) by Abu al-Ma’ali al-Musharraf Ibn al-Murajja al-Maqdisi (d. after 1047/438 AH). Both were composed only decades before the first Crusade, but continued to serve as the main sources for later Fada’il al-Quds tracts composed after the Frank’s Crusader conquest of Jerusalem in 1099 CE (492 AH) and during the Ayyubid, Mamluk, and Ottoman periods.

Fada’il al-Quds treatises composed during the Ayyubid period (1171–1250/567–648 AH) were primarily circulated to renew the sanctity of Jerusalem in the Islamic
consciousness in service of recapturing or holding onto the city during waves of Crusader attacks. The major works on the merits of Jerusalem composed during this period are *al-Mustaqsa fi ziyarat al-Masjid al-Aqsa* (The comprehensive survey into pilgrimage to Jerusalem) by the Damascene scholar Shafi‘i al-Qasim Baha’ al-Din Hasan ibn ‘Ali ibn ‘Asakir (d. 1203/600 AH), the son of the illustrious Damascene historian Thiqat al-Din Abu al-Qasim ‘Ali ibn ‘Asakir (d. 1176/571 AH); *Fada’il al-Quds* by the renowned Hanbali Baghdadi Abu al-Faraj ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn ‘Ali ibn al-Jawzi (1116–1201/510–597 AH); and *Fada’il Bayt al-Maqdis* by the esteemed Damascene Hanbali Diya’ al-Din Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahid al-Maqdisi (d.1245/643 AH).

The *Fada’il al-Quds* genre flourished during the Mamluk period (1250–1517/648–923 AH). By the time the Crusades ended and Mamluk rule over Palestine stabilized in the fourteenth century (eighth century AH), the city experienced long periods of peace, which naturally helped increase the number of Muslim pilgrims to the region. As a result, *Fada’il al-Quds* literature peaked during this period, with tens of different texts produced by both Jerusalemite and non-Jerusalemite authors. Indeed, the Mamluk period produced some of the most important *Fada’il al-Quds* texts, including *al-Uns al-jalil bi-ta’rikh al-Quds wa-al-Khalil* (The sublime companion to the history of Jerusalem and Hebron), the major *Fada’il* -cum-chronicle on Islamic Jerusalem by the city’s chief Hanbali judge Abu al-Yumn Mujir al-Din ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad al-‘Ulaymi (d. 1522/928 AH), and *Ithaf al-akhissa bi-fada’il al-Masjid al-Aqsa* (The gifting of friends with the merits of Jerusalem) by the Egyptian Shafi‘i scholar Shams al-Din Muhammad ibn Shihab al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 880/475 AH). The rise of non-Jerusalemite authors, in particular, reflects the increasing number of pilgrims and other Muslim travelers visiting the city during the Mamluk period. By the sixteenth century (tenth century AH), however, and with the beginning of the Ottoman period, the *Fada’il al-Quds* literature on Jerusalem began to decline.

**Jerusalem’s Christian Holy Sites in *Fada’il al-Quds***

The first important Christian holy site cited in the *Fada’il al-Quds* texts is the Mount of Olives (*Tur Zayta*). The *Fada’il* literature includes several traditions relating to the importance of the Mount of Olives and its connection to Christian narratives. For example, authors mention that the Mount of Olives is the location from which God raised Jesus to the Heavens (in keeping with the alternative Islamic narrative on Jesus’s crucifixion, in which God raised him to the Heavens to prevent his death on the cross). Indeed, one of the holy sites located on the Mount of Olives that is cited in the *Fada’il* literature and sanctified by the traditions is the Church of the Ascension (see figure 2). Referred to as *kanisat al-Tur* in the genre, the Church of the Ascension is identified by some *Fada’il* authors as the location where Jesus was raised to the Heavens. This Christian holy spot also became a destination for Muslim pilgrimage after Salah al-Din’s conquest of the city, where “pilgrims of both religions prayed in different locations at the site.”
The Fada’il literature also links the Mount of Olives to the location of al-Sahira, a site in Islamic tradition connected with the eschatological events of the End of Days. Authors cite Qur’anic verse 79:14 that mentions al-Sahira and proceed to describe its location and its role during Judgment Day. According to the Fada’il traditions, al-Sahira is the valley at the foot of the Mount of Olives (Kidron Valley, Wadi al-Jawz, or the Valley of Jehoshaphat), where souls will translocate before being admitted to Heaven or to Hell. Fada’il texts direct Muslims to visit al-Sahira and perform the supplication (du’a’) that, according to the Islamic tradition, Jesus had recited before he was lifted to the Heavens.

Figure 2. Yusuf al-Natsheh, “Qubbat al-Su’ud (Dome of Ascension),” in Discover Islamic Art, Museum with No Frontiers, 2023; online at islamricart.museumwnf.org/database_item.php?id=monument;ISL;pa;Mon01;5;en (accessed 21 September 2023).

The Tomb of the Virgin Mary is also cited in several different Fada’il al-Quds traditions (see figure 3). One tradition found in almost all texts is connected with Prophet Muhammad’s Nocturnal Journey to Jerusalem – al-isra’. As part of the isra’ narrative, the Fada’il texts describe hadiths that detail the Prophet’s journey on
the mythical creature al-Buraq along with the Archangel Gabriel. During the flight, Muhammad spots two shining lights, one to his right and the other to his left. Gabriel informs Muhammad that “on your right hand side is Mihrab Dawud and on your left-hand side is the tomb of your sister Mary [mother of Jesus].” As Dionigi Albera explains, there is evidence revealing that the Tomb of the Virgin Mary was in fact frequented by Muslims, where they shared sacred spaces with Christians at the sepulcher.

Figure 3. Yusuf al-Natsheh, “Church of the Tomb of Mary,” in Discover Islamic Art, Museum with No Frontiers, 2023; online at islamart.museumwnf.org/database_item.php?id=monument;IS-L:pa;Mon01;24;en (accessed 21 September 2023).

The Mount of Olives is also, according to Mujir al-Din, the location of the presumed tomb of Rabi‘a al-‘Adawiyya, the early female mystic who some Muslims in Jerusalem believe is buried atop the mountain “next to the place where Lord Jesus Peace Be Upon Him was raised to the Heavens [that is, the Church of the Ascension]” (bijiwar mas‘ad al-sayyid ‘Isa ‘alayhi al-salam). Mujir al-Din also writes that her tomb lies below a set of stairs, and, importantly, it is frequented by many. Building on Benjamin Z. Kedar’s research and applying his typology of shared sacred spaces, Ora Limor describes how this holy site was a shared sacred space among adherents to all three monotheistic religions who undertook pilgrimage to this central holy site on the Mount of Olives. Christians, Limor reveals, visited the tomb since it is believed within their tradition that it is the burial place of Saint Pelagia of Antioch, while Jews
during the fourteenth century began to claim that the same burial site belongs to the prophetess Huldah who dates back to the reign of King Josiah.\(^{37}\)

In the same traditions on the Prophet’s *isra‘* journey to Jerusalem, Muhammad describes how he and the Archangel Gabriel flew over Bethlehem when, “Gabriel told me: ‘This is the birthplace of your brother Jesus so dismount [from al-Buraq] and pray there.’”\(^{38}\) It is interesting to note here that whereas traditions praising the burial place of Mary are cited without noting the specific location of her tomb, here the city of Bethlehem is mentioned by name as the birthplace of Jesus. Moreover, in *al-Uns al-jalil*, Mujir al-Din goes one step further and specifically cites the location as the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem (see figure 4).\(^{39}\) Indeed, in a unique discussion on Byzantine history, Mujir al-Din describes the religious building program undertaken by Emperor Constantine’s mother Helen in Jerusalem.\(^{40}\) He lists several churches that she had erected in the Holy Land, such as the Church of the Nativity, the Church of the Ascension, the Tomb of the Virgin Mary (here referred to as *al-kanisa al-Jismaniya*, since the tomb is located in the Church of Saint Mary of the Valley of Jehoshaphat at the lower end of Gethsemane), and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.\(^{41}\)

![Church of the Nativity](https://islamicart.museumwnf.org/database_item.php?id=monument;ISL;pa;Mon01;23;en)
In addition to Bethlehem, the Fada’il al-Quds texts cite traditions on a few other locations special to Christianity. One such place is the Jordan River. According to Ibn al-Murajja, the Jordan River is sanctified in Islam since it is the location where John the Baptist (Yahya) had moved for quiet contemplation of his fate.⁴² In al-Uns al-jalil, Mujir al-Din specifically links the Jordan River to John’s baptism of Jesus.⁴³ Mujir al-Din also includes Nazareth within his description of sacred sites in the Holy Land, citing Nazareth as the place to which the infant Jesus and his mother Mary returned to after escaping Herod’s persecution in the Holy Land.⁴⁴

Mujir al-Din also refers, albeit indirectly, to the location of the Last Supper. In his discussion of the Tomb of David, Mujir al-Din explains that David was buried at the Church of Saint Mary of Mount Sion (kanisat Sahyun),⁴⁵ which was captured and
controlled by the Franks until the Muslims expelled them (see figure 5). Now, he adds, this location “is in the hands of the Muslims, and there is in it kanisat Sahyun, a place that the Christians extol.” It is well known that the second floor above the Tomb of David is the location of the Cenacle, the medieval chamber where Christians believe the Last Supper took place. Therefore, it can be deduced here that Mujir al-Din is referring to the site of the Last Supper.

![Figure 5. Entrance to the Tomb of David located in the Church of Mount Sion (Jabal Sahyun).](https://islamicart.museumwnf.org/database_item.php?id=monument;isl;l;pa;mon01;35;en)

There are several other holy sites in the Islamic tradition that, though not necessarily sacred in Christianity, receive their religious importance due to their association with Christian figures. For example, Fada’il al-Quds traditions extol the sacredness of what is referred to as Mihrab Maryam or Mahd ‘Isa. This site is located at the southeastern corner below the Haram al-Sharif complex and, according to the Islamic narrative, it is the site where Mary stayed during her pregnancy with Jesus, receiving sustenance from God. Another account characterizes it as the location where the Annunciation to Mary took place. According to the Fada’il texts, a Muslim should stop by Mihrab Maryam/Mahd ‘Isa and should pray there and recite the Qur’anic chapter of Mary...
(surat Maryam). Specifically, texts implore Muslims to recite the supplication of Jesus when, according to Islamic tradition, God raised him to the Heavens. As Ibn al-Murajja writes, for example:

Then [the Muslim visitor] should proceed toward Mihrab Maryam … which is known as Mahd ‘Isa … and to intensify his supplication, for supplications here are well-received, and pray there and read surat Maryam … and prostrate as ‘Umar [ibn al-Khattab] did at Mihrab Dawud … and the best supplication is that of Jesus – peace be upon him – that he recited when God raised Jesus to Him from the Mount of Olives, and [the Muslim pilgrim should] repent and thank God for his visit to this blessed place. If one does this, his sins would be remitted as on the day when his mother gave birth to him.52

In addition to Mihrab Maryam/Mahd ‘Isa, Fada’il texts encourage Muslim visitors to Jerusalem to stop by Mihrab Zakariyya, a sacred Islamic site located in the Haram complex.53 Named after the father of John the Baptist, this space is described in the Fada’il literature as a place where Mary had stayed while Zakariyya provided for her during her pregnancy with Jesus.54 Traditions here guide Muslims to pray there and “ask from God the reward of Heaven.”55

The Spring of Siloam (‘Ayn Silwan) is also connected to Mary’s pregnancy with Jesus in the Fada’il al-Quds literature.56 The Spring of Siloam is generally considered a blessed site in Islamic tradition and is part of the itinerary of each Muslim pilgrim visiting Jerusalem, for it is connected to the Well of Zamzam in Mecca and is believed to be one of the springs of Paradise.57 The Spring of Siloam is also linked with the episode when, according to Islamic tradition, Mary came to the spring to hide her pregnancy; Mary drank from its blessed waters and, as a result, her pregnancy was kept secret.58

Although Mary is extolled repeatedly in Fada’il al-Quds texts, some traditions within the corpus provide cautionary precepts on holy sites associated with her. On the one hand, for example, we have seen that Mary’s burial site (qabr Maryam), or the Tomb of the Virgin Mary, located, as previously mentioned, in the Church of Saint Mary of the Valley of Jehoshaphat, is given special place within the Islamic tradition.59 The Tomb of the Virgin Mary is sanctified in almost all the Fada’il texts since, as explained earlier, it appeared to Muhammad during his isra’ journey to Jerusalem.60

On the other hand, the Fada’il texts also provide somewhat contradictory traditions on this holy place: although the Tomb of the Virgin Mary is considered sacred in these texts, authors warn Muslims against visiting the church that houses it – referred to as kanisat Maryam (the Church of Mary) or sometimes al-kanisa al-Jismaniya (the Church of Gethsemane). As previously explained, the term al-kanisa al-Jismaniya is connected with the location of Mary’s tomb and the church housing it. Indeed, Denys Pringle reveals that the so-called al-kanisa al-Jismaniya is the Church of Saint Mary of the Valley of Jehoshaphat, which is the lower church in Gethsemane.61 Ka’b al-Ahbar, a seventh century (first century AH) Jewish convert to Islam and one of the
main sources for the biblical legends in the Fada’il al-Quds, is cited in this regard: “Ka‘b said: Do not visit kanisat Maryam [meaning the Church of Saint Mary of the Valley of Jehoshaphat] … [for Christians] never built a church unless it was in the Valley of Hell [Jahannam].”62 Other traditions claim that ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab paid a visit to kanisat Maryam and prayed there, only to regret his visit once it was revealed to him that this specific church was in the Valley of Hell.63

Similarly, while the Fada’il al-Quds includes traditions that sanctify the Mount of Olives and compels Muslims to visit it, there are also interpretations among Fada’il al-Quds authors that claim that the Mount of Olives and/or the valley situated at the foot of it, where the Tomb of the Virgin Mary lies, is also the location of al-Sahira. As previously detailed, the place al-Sahira is cited in Qur’anic verse 79:14.64 It has been connected with, in the analysis of some medieval scholars, the End of Days, such as the “spot where all souls shall gather on the Day of Judgment” (ard al-mahshar wa-al-manshar),65 and, in some interpretations, the location of Hell (jahannam) itself.66

One could argue, therefore, that the main reason why this tradition is exhorting Muslims not to visit the Church of Saint Mary is religiogeographical – or, simply, a question of eschatology. It could be postulated here that Muslims are being admonished from visiting the church because it is located in what the Islamic tradition considers as the Valley of Hell. What if this church was not located in such an “unblessed” site? Would it still be inadmissible for Muslims to visit it? Is the area considered the Valley of Hell because this church is located there? Or did it happen that the church simply exists in the larger area of the Valley of Hell, and so it is recommended for Muslims not to visit this place and the sites located there, such as the Church of Saint Mary? In other words, if this tradition exhorted Muslims not to visit the Church of Saint Mary because of its location in the Valley of Hell, what about churches in less inauspicious locations?

Can a Muslim Enter a Church in Jerusalem?

In fact, the issue of whether Muslims could visit this or any other church is touched upon in the two earliest extant Fada’il al-Quds texts prior to the Crusades. In the eleventh century (fifth century AH) texts of al-Wasiti and Ibn al-Murajja, the authors added to the end of the tradition extolling the sanctity of Mihrab Dawud and the Spring of Siloam an enjoinder against entering churches: “And do not enter the churches nor buy there what is being sold, for one sin [in a church] is equal to one thousand sins, and a good deed [hasana] is equal to one thousand good deeds!”67

On the surface, the directive seems to discourage Muslims from visiting all churches. However, it is important to note that while sins, according to the tradition, multiply, so do good deeds. The concept of multiplication of good deeds and sins is associated with Jerusalem’s Islamic holy sites more generally, which are, naturally, sanctified and visited by Muslims in the city.68 Additionally, this concept can even be found in Fada’il traditions on Mecca and its al-Masjid al-Haram sanctuary housing the Ka‘ba.69 In other words, a church may also be seen as a holy site for Muslims where,
as is the case with other Islamic holy spots in Jerusalem— and in Mecca— both sins and good deeds committed within its confines are multiplied. Therefore, the fact that a church, or an area housing a church, has the power to exaggerate the consequences of actions committed therein should not necessarily mean that Muslims should be prohibited from entering it. If anything, it may mean that one should be more careful and attentive to his/her behavior within the confines of this place— as a sacred place.

Yet these traditions that seemingly discourage Muslims from visiting churches took a significant turn in Fada’il al-Quds texts composed in the period after the Crusades. During the Mamlik period, authors adopted novel and original approaches to debates around the permissibility for Muslims of entering a church in Jerusalem. Suleiman Mourad has argued that the Crusades had a significant impact on the content and form of the Fada’il al-Quds literature. According to Mourad, texts composed during the Crusades, particularly during the Ayyubid period and after, adopted a more Islamicized view of Jerusalem, emphasizing, for example, citations of Jerusalem in the Qur’an and hadith, and began to “dissociate Jerusalem gradually from its non-Islamic heritage,” and emphasize “the exclusive Islamic dimension” of the city. This, Mourad finds, was accomplished partly through contributions to the genre by major Ayyubid scholars of hadith, including al-Qasim Ibn ‘Asakir and Diya’ al-Din al-Maqdisi, whereas during the pre-Crusades period, Fada’il al-Quds were composed by “average scholars,” such as al-Wasiti and Ibn al-Murajja. Further, texts composed during the period when Jerusalem was ruled by the Franks in the twelfth century (sixth century AH) were produced for the “purpose of preaching and propaganda … for public impulse for the liberation and protection of Jerusalem.”

With the fall of Acre in 1291 (690 AH) and the expulsion of the last Crusader post on the Syrian coast, Mamluk rule over Jerusalem stabilized the city and consolidated its Islamic character through intensive religious building programs. With the seeming end to the European threat and the return of political continuity, pilgrimage to Jerusalem also increased. One manifestation of this increased pilgrimage activity is the significant proliferation of Fada’il al-Quds texts composed during this period. As a result, emphasis on the Islamic dimension of Jerusalem continued during the Mamluk period, and therefore Fada’il al-Quds texts from the period also exhibited an increasingly Islamic form.

Mourad reveals that, as a result of the impact of the Crusades on the genre, two major trends on the sanctity of Jerusalem emerged in the corpus. On the one hand, Shafii circles inherited Fada’il al-Quds texts that continued to include biblical traditions on the city, such as the work of the Shafii al-Qasim Ibn ‘Asakir, “not only as necessary but as foundational for a proper understanding of the sacredness of Jerusalem in Islam.” On the other hand, Hanbali circles, including, Mourad points out, the major renowned Hanbali scholar Taqi al-Din Ahmad ibn ‘Abd al-Halim ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328/661–728 AH), inherited the text of Diya’ al-Din al-Maqdisi which only emphasized Islamic traditions on the city, where the biblical material was sidelined and replaced with traditions strictly associating the sanctity of the city with the life events of the Prophet, the Qur’an, and the Apocalypse.
This madhhab-based bifurcation in post-Crusades authors’ approaches to the composition of Fada’il al-Quds texts is evident in the debate over whether Muslims should enter churches, a question which, during the Mamluk period, drew increasingly on religious authorities and sources. For example, in his Ithaf al-akhissa, the Shafi’i Shams al-Din al-Suyuti includes the tradition that discourages Muslims from visiting the Church of Saint Mary of the Valley of Jehoshaphat, which houses the Tomb of the Virgin Mary. However, immediately after, al-Suyuti introduces the reader to the opinions of Islamic scholars on whether Muslims are generally allowed to enter churches. Such a discussion was an innovation of al-Suyuti’s work and does not appear in any pre-Crusades Fada’il al-Quds texts. Al-Suyuti first cites Kitab al-badi’ fi tafdil al-Islam (The sublime book on the superiority of Islam) of Abu ‘Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Abi Bakr al-Maqdisi, which states that Muslims are forbidden to enter the Church of Saint Mary of the Valley of Jehoshaphat (referred to here as al-kanisa al-Jismaniya based, as explained earlier, on its location near Gethsemane), which houses the Tomb of the Virgin Mary, “except with the [Christians’] permission since they hate that [Muslims] enter it” (my emphasis). He also cites an opinion that instead limits Muslims’ visits to those churches that lack portraits or images (tasawir). Al-Suyuti continues to delineate the views of other important ‘ulama’ on this issue, indicating that some prominent earlier figures such as Abu Musa al-Ash’ari, a companion of the Prophet, had prayed in churches.

Al-Suyuti finally settles the debate by citing the Shafi’i scholar Shihab al-Din Ahmad ibn al-‘Imad al-Aqfahsi (before 1349–1405/750–808 AH) and his Tashil al-maqasid li-zuwwar al-masajid (Simplifying the objectives of law for visitors of mosques), an ahkam (legal precepts and rulings) manual on mosques. Al-Suyuti writes that according to Tashil al-maqasid, Ibn al-‘Imad al-Aqfahsi allows Muslims to enter churches and pray there only if four conditions are met:

Firstly, that [Christians] give permission to [a Muslim] to enter … Secondly, that there should be no images [tasawir] for if there were images on its walls, which is usually the case, entering it is prohibited, for entering an abode that has images is forbidden. However, if it had images that are not removable, then yes [entry to that church] is allowed on the authority of al-Istakhri and Ibn al-Sabbagh …. Thirdly, it is forbidden if there is an increase in their black clothing and their rituals and their prayers and the glorification of their worship. Fourthly, that there should be no impurity [najasa] in it for if there was impurity then it is not allowed except if it is changed.

Al-Suyuti ends the discussion with the example of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, which he states is forbidden for a Muslim to visit since it contains images. It is not clear here why this would be the ruling since, as al-Suyuti adjudicates based on the authorities he cites, if images cannot be removed then entry to the church should be allowed. In fact, as will be demonstrated later, Muslims did visit the Chiruch
of the Nativity, especially during the Ottoman period, as the accounts of Ottoman travel literature on Jerusalem reveal.

However, al-Suyuti’s introduction here of certain conditions that enable Muslims to enter churches is in contrast to the Hanbali view on the matter. Writing during the fourteenth century (eighth century AH), Ibn Taymiyya addresses this question in his *Qa’ida fi ziyarat Bayt al-Maqdis* (A legal treatise on undertaking pilgrimage to Jerusalem), a work opining on the legality of visiting Islamic and non-Islamic holy sites in the city.84 In this short work, Ibn Taymiyya asserts that traveling to Jerusalem with the intention of undertaking pilgrimage (ziyara) and praying there is permissible, as long as the rituals practiced are legally-sanctioned worship (‘ibada mashru’a).85 In other words, Ibn Taymiyya permits practicing ziyara to Jerusalem but with limitations on what a pilgrim can or cannot do there. He thus proceeds to list certain ziyara rituals and practices that are forbidden in and around the city. One of the pilgrimage rituals Ibn Taymiyya opposes is visiting churches and other Christian sacred sites in Jerusalem. For example, he opposes pilgrimage to Jabal Sahyun (Mount Zion), the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (al-mawdi’ al-musamma bi-al-qumama), and Bethlehem.86 Ibn Taymiyya thus inherits the post-Crusades Hanbali approach to the Fada’il al-Quds, which not only eliminates biblical material from the corpus, but also, as the case here with Ibn Taymiyya’s *Qa’ida*, forbids Muslims from entering churches altogether.

Ibn Taymiyya’s precepts banning Muslims from entering churches represents the Hanbali inheritance of strictly Islamic traditions on Jerusalem, while al-Suyuti’s more flexible approach provides the Shafi‘i ruling on the question of whether Muslims can enter churches in the city. Nevertheless, both madhhab’s articulations on the question are an interesting attempt to locate this issue within Islamic law, and can therefore be read as part of the increased Islamic character of post-Crusades Fada’il al-Quds works. Yet by introducing such analysis to the Fada’il al-Quds corpus, authors paradoxically relaxed the outright prohibition on entering churches cited in pre-Crusades works. Muslims were now able to visit churches subject only to specific conditions. As a result, the door was left open for Muslims who desired to visit churches, and Christian holy sites became increasingly incorporated within the Islamic sacred landscape of Jerusalem. The practice of visiting churches in Bayt al-Maqdis became even more widespread, especially during the Ottoman period.

The View from the Early Modern Ottoman Period

The early modern Ottoman period experienced a decline in new Fada’il al-Quds works.87 In comparison to the many works of Fada’il al-Quds produced during the Mamluk period, less than ten known works were composed during the Ottoman period.88 In place of Fada’il al-Quds texts, Arabic travelogue literature specifically on Jerusalem thrived during this period. Muslim travelers who visited the city and toured the Holy Land composed these works and, indeed, through these Arabic travel writings on Ottoman Jerusalem Fada’il al-Quds traditions were preserved during the early modern period.89 Arabic travelogue literature on Jerusalem contains
detailed observations and reports on the city, but they also quote earlier sources on Jerusalem, including referencing extensively from the Fada’il al-Quds literature. In fact, many of these travel writings reproduced Fada’il al-Quds works in full. As such, the Arab travelers’ accounts on Jerusalem during the Ottoman period serve not only as a rich historical source for the city during this period, but also constitutes a reservoir of Fada’il al-Quds writings, thus maintaining and continuing this important religiohistorical genre.

Some of the surviving Fada’il al-Quds texts composed during the Ottoman period provide further insight into the debate over whether Muslims should visit Christian sites in the Holy Land. For example, in al-Mustaṣqa fi fada’il al-Masjid al-Aqsa (The comprehensive survey into the merits of al-Aqsa Mosque), Muhammad ibn Khidr al-Maqdisi (d. 1545/952 AH) cites the same debate on the legality of Muslims entering churches that al-Suyuti had earlier expounded upon in his Ithaf al-akhissa. Following his account of the traditions on the Tomb of the Virgin Mary and its church near Gethsemane, Ibn Khidr al-Maqdisi delineates the opinions of several scholars before outlining the same four conditions that permit a Muslim to enter a church. Interestingly, Ibn Khidr al-Maqdisi cites another sacred space that is connected to Mary – the Church of St. Anne (see figure 6). Built first by the Crusaders, the Church of St. Anne was named after Mary’s mother. Following Salah al-Din’s capture of Jerusalem, the church was converted to a madrasa bearing the Ayyubid sultan’s name – al-Madrasa al-Salahiyya.
On the other hand, in *Lata’if uns al-jalil fi taha’if al-Quds wa al-Khalil* (The elegances of the sublime companion in the gifts of Jerusalem and Hebron), another Fada’il al-Quds work from the Ottoman period, Mustafa As‘ad al-Luqaymi (d. 1759/1173 AH) reports the tradition that discourages Muslims from visiting any church, warning that committing one sin in a church is equivalent to a thousand sins (and that a good deed done in a church is similarly multiplied). Yet, in other sections he openly describes how Muslims visited and prayed in certain churches. For example, in his account of *al-kanisa al-Jismaniya*, al-Luqaymi states that this church and Mary’s tomb within it are frequented by both Muslims and Christians: “and on the Mount of Olives there is a church called the Church of Gethsemane … that holds the Tomb of Mary peace be upon her, a place visited by Muslim and Christian pilgrims.” Yet even though he reports the visits of Muslims to this church, al-Luqaymi immediately follows this account with the reports of ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab’s regret for praying there and Ka‘b’s exhortation to Muslims not to enter it.

Nevertheless, al-Luqaymi continues to detail the shared sacred spaces among Muslims and Christians in the city. According to al-Luqaymi, *kanisat Sahyun* was a highly frequented sacred space, visited by Muslims and Christians. This *kanisat Sahyun* is, as explained earlier, the Church of St. Mary of Mount Sion, which houses the Cenacle of the Last Supper frequented, naturally, by Christians, as well as the Tomb of David, which is sacred to and visited by Muslims and Jews. Even al-Luqaymi’s detailed description of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem betrays his earlier precepts on visiting churches in this Fada’il al-Quds work. Indeed, in his report on the towns and villages surrounding Jerusalem, al-Luqaymi mentions Bethlehem, the town “where Jesus was born,” describing its population as mainly Christian before proceeding to provide a detailed description of both the outside and the inside of the Church of the Nativity:

And within [Bethlehem] there is a well-built church, within it there are three *mihrabs*, one of which is facing the blessed *qibla*, and the second facing eastward, and the third toward the Blessed Rock [*al-sakhra al-sharifa*] [in al-Haram al-Sharif]. And its roof is made of wood, raised upon fifty pillars of yellow marble, in addition to the walls built of rocks, and its floor furnished with marble … And it is built by Helen [mother of Emperor Constantine], and within it is the birthplace of Jesus peace be upon him, in a cave … between the three *mihrabs*.

Considering the great details in his report, it is safe to assume that al-Luqaymi had paid a visit to this church, which he himself confirms in his travelogue on Jerusalem, *Tahdhib mawanih al-uns bi-rihlati li-wadi al-Quds* (The refinement of the companion’s pleasantries in my voyage to the Valley of Jerusalem).

Indeed, in *Tahdhib mawanih al-uns*, al-Luqaymi directly reports on his visits to several churches. For example, during his stay at Bethlehem, al-Luqaymi writes that he in fact visited the Church of the Nativity. Although he laments that Christians controlled the church, he nevertheless emotes on the beauty of the site and includes a
long description of Jesus’s life. During his tour of Jerusalem, al-Luqaymi writes that he visited the church at Gethsemane where Mary is buried – the Church of Saint Mary of the Valley of Jehoshaphat – and recited the Qur’an at its door. He then writes an ode to Mary, followed by an account of his visit to the Mount of Olives where he composed another ode to Jesus and the episode in which he was raised to the Heavens by God.

Similarly, in the travelogue al-Hadra al-unsiyya fi al-rihla al-Qudsiiyya (The sublime presence in the Jerusalemite voyage), ‘Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi (1641–1731/1050–1143 AH) reports on his visit to several churches during his travels to the Holy Land in 1690 (1101 AH). In Bethlehem, al-Nabulusi visited the Church of the Nativity, and stood and recited the Qur’an there. He follows this report with one of many of his poems, including an ode to Bethlehem and to Jesus. Al-Nabulusi further describes in great detail the Grotto of the Nativity, where it is believed that Jesus was born. He also describes the Mount of Olives and how, according to Islamic tradition, God had raised Jesus to the Heavens from the Mount, after which he recounts a visit to the Tomb of the Virgin Mary, a famous place that, according to the author, “is frequented by many people including Muslims and Christians,” adding that “this church is built by Helen mother of Constantine.” By visiting the church and attending to Mary’s tomb, al-Nabulusi thus overlooked the tradition’s prohibition against Muslims entering churches.

The relaxation of such prohibitions – and the resultant frequent visits paid by Muslims to Christian holy sites – during the Ottoman period is further evident in the late eighteenth century (twelfth century AH) travelogue of Muhammad ibn ‘Uthman al-Miknasi, Ihraz al-mu’alla wa al-raqiib fi hajj Bayt Allah al-Haram wa ziyarat al-Quds al-Sharif wa-al-Khalil wa-al-tabarruk bi-qabr al-Habib (Reaching [God] the Noble and the Watchful in the hajj to God’s Noble Sanctuary [in Mecca] and pilgrimage to Jerusalem and Hebron and attaining the blessings of the Prophet’s Tomb [in Medina]) (tr. 1785). Like al-Luqaymi and al-Nabulusi before him, the Moroccan al-Miknasi paid visits to several churches in the Holy Land. For example, during his visit to the Mount of Olives, al-Miknasi entered Mary’s Tomb. Like al-Luqaymi, al-Miknasi lamented Christian control of this sacred space, where he also recited the Fatiha, the opening chapter of the Qur’an. Al-Miknasi also visited the Chapel of the Ascension. Here, al-Miknasi reveals his knowledge of the importance of the place, explaining that it was from here that “Jesus peace be upon him was raised.” He also stopped in Bethlehem and, against al-Suyuti’s precept, visited the Church of the Nativity there, entering inside to view the cradle of Jesus and read the Fatiha.

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre: An Exception to the Rule?

What about the most sacred Christian site in the Holy Land, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre? Fada’il al-Quds texts are replete with negative traditions regarding the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (see figure 7). The church is commonly referred to with the derogatory title kanisat al-qumama, the Church of the Dunghill, a play on the
name of the church in Arabic, *kanisat al-qiyama* (the Church of the Resurrection).\(^{112}\)

According to Islamic traditions in Fada’il al-Quds works, Christians during the Byzantine period would dump their refuse (*qumama*) onto the Noble Rock on the Temple Mount.\(^{113}\) Following the Islamic conquest of Jerusalem during the seventh century (first century AH), the Rock, according to the Fada’il traditions, was cleaned of the piles of refuse and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre began instead to be referred to pejoratively by Muslims as *kanisat al-qumama*.\(^{114}\)

Figure 7. Yusuf al-Natsheh, “Church of the Holy Sepulchre,” in Discover Islamic Art, Museum with No Frontiers, 2023; online at islamicart.museumwnf.org/database_item.php?id=monument;IS-L;pa;Mon01;20;en (accessed 21 September 2023).

Although the Fada’il al-Quds literature does not extol the sanctity of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, nevertheless there are indications that Muslims did in fact visit this church. The earliest source describing visits by Muslims to Christian holy sites dates back several centuries before Ibn Taymiyya had composed his treatise. As early as the tenth century (fourth century AH), medieval Arabo-Islamic authors have reported how Muslims shared sacred spaces with fellow Christians in Jerusalem. For example, in his *Muruj al-dhahab wa ma’adin al-jawhar* (Meadows of gold and mines of gem), Abu al-Hasan ‘Ali b. al-Husayn al-Mas‘udi (born probably a few years before 893/280 AH and died 956/346 AH) wrote on the city and its Christian
holy sites. While describing the days of Easter, al-Mas‘udi reports on the celebrated day of the Miracle of Holy Fire, describing, significantly, the presence of Muslims during the festivities at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre:

On the 5th day of the (Syrian) month Tishrin I (October) is the festival of the Kanisah al Kumâmah (Church of the Sepulchre) at Jerusalem. The Christians assemble for this festival from out all lands. For on it the Fire from Heaven doth descend among them, so that they kindle therefrom the candles. The Muslims also are wont to assemble in great crowds to see the sight of the festival. It is the custom also at this time to pluck olive leaves. The Christians hold many legends there anent; but the Fire is produced by a clever artifice, which is kept a great secret.

Guy Le Strange remarks that al-Mas‘udi’s reports here, which were composed in 943 (332 AH), are significant since they were written only several decades after Bernard the Wise had made his observations on the Miracle of Holy Fire in 867 (252 AH), which, according to Le Strange, is the first known report made by a medieval Western European on this curious festival.

A couple of centuries later, the presence of Muslims inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is further confirmed by Abu al-Hasan ‘Ali ibn Abi Bakr al-Harawi (d. 1215/611 AH). Writing in his twelfth century (sixth century AH) pilgrimage manual, Kitab al-isharat li-ma‘rifat al-ziyarat (The book of signs to inform pilgrimage), al-Harawi lists the holy sites in Jerusalem, including important Christian churches in the city. He explains that the greatest church here is the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and proceeds to provide details about the place, including descriptions of both its interior and exterior. Ending his account of the church, he adds that, concerning the Miracle of Holy Fire (nuzul al-nur), he was able to, after staying in Jerusalem a considerable duration, figure out how it happens. He also writes elsewhere that he had recorded measurements and outlines of the entire church, although his observations were – frustratingly – lost when his ship sunk off the coast of Sicily. Considering his detailed knowledge of the inside of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, his familiarity with the Miracle of the Holy Fire and its apparent workings, along with his (lost) architectural measurements of the church, it can be safely hypothesized that al-Harawi had visited Christianity’s holiest spot.

Similarly, and during the same century, al-Idrisi also recorded in detail the inside of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. In his 1154/548 AH geography work Nuzhat al-mushtaq fi ikhtiraq al-afaq (The voyage of the yearned to penetrate the horizons), Abu ‘Abd Allah Muhammad b. ‘Abd Allah b. Idris al-Hammudi, known as al-Sharif al-Idrisi, describes the geography and topography of Jerusalem and its important holy places, including Christian sites. Here al-Idrisi provides an even more detailed description of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. While it is known that al-Idrisi had travelled in the western Islamic lands, it is not certain whether he had visited Jerusalem during his travels. However, his elaborate portrait of the interior of the church may lead one to believe that he may have visited the Holy City.

[ 88 ] Sharing the Holy Land | Fadi Ragheb
Three centuries later, the Hanbali Mujir al-Din reports in *al-Uns al-jalil* that during the Fatimid period (909–1171/297–567 AH), Muslims were known to not only visit the Church of the Holy Sepulchre but also to participate in Christian ceremonies during Easter. Mujir al-Din notes that Muslim participation during these festivities continued into the latter part of the fifteenth century (ninth century AH), at the time when he was writing his *al-Uns al-jalil*:

> And they [the Christians] until today … [perform their Easter ceremonies] in the [Church of] Qumama [Church of the Holy Sepulchre] … That day [of the Miracle of Holy Fire] is called Holy Saturday (*Sabt al-Nur*), and there committed on that day the wrong (*al-munkar*) in the presence of Muslims, which should be forbidden for Muslims to see or hear.

Not only does Mujir al-Din report the presence of Muslims at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre during Easter, but he, as a Hanbali scholar writing after the Crusades, is also forbidding Muslims from entering churches, in this case Christianity’s holiest spot.

Although Mujir al-Din admonishes such practices in the strongest terms, the presence of Muslims in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre during Easter is revealing. Despite the protestations by Mujir al-Din and other Hanbali ‘ulama’, Muslims continued to visit churches in Jerusalem. They even participated, in one form or another, and side by side with Christians in performing certain rituals in churches throughout the Holy Land for centuries.

**Conclusion**

Such reports on Muslims and Christians sharing sacred spaces in Jerusalem must have caused great consternation among the conservative Muslim establishment. As revealed in this study, the Hanbali scholar Ibn Taymiyya was thus compelled to write his *Qa‘ida* against certain pilgrimage rituals in the Holy Land. Yet Ibn Taymiyya’s exhortations seem to have gone unheeded and, furthermore, it represented only the Hanbali teachings on the matter. As analysis of *Fada’il al-Quds* literature and Ottoman travelogue works on Jerusalem shows, Muslims visited and extolled the sanctity of certain Christian sacred spaces before, during, and after Ibn Taymiyya’s lifetime. Different Christian holy sites, including the Mount of Olives, the Tomb of the Virgin Mary, the Church of the Ascension, and the Church of the Nativity were sanctified in the Islamic tradition based on their connection with figures and episodes significant to both Christianity and Islam.

While certain traditions in pre-Crusade texts discouraged Muslims from visiting churches, *Fada’il al-Quds* works written after the Crusades began to show a more flexible attitude toward this phenomenon. As part of the increasing Islamic character of the genre, scholarly authors began to rely on Islamic authorities to settle the debate over the legality of Muslims visiting churches, especially in the Shafi‘i madhhab, which paradoxically resulted in setting forth conditions that allowed Muslims to visit
churches. By the time of the Ottoman period, evidence from Fada’il al-Quds and travelogue literature dating from the early modern era indicated that Muslims of the period frequently visited churches and performed Islamic rituals within the confines of these sacred Christian spaces. Even the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, with its contentious and less than flattering image in the Fada’il al-Quds traditions, was, according to authors of the period, frequented by Muslims for centuries. They not only entered the church but also participated with fellow Christians in Easter ceremonies.

It must be said that there were tangible divisions, hostilities, and barriers to mixing, which were set up by some Hanbali ‘ulama’ at the time and even by political authorities. There was Ibn Taymiyya’s religious treatise against visiting churches in Jerusalem. There were also architectural efforts by Mamluk authorities, such as, for example, the highly symbolic construction of the Salahiyya minaret and the renewal of the minaret of Jami‘ ‘Umar (the Mosque of ‘Umar), which were flanking the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. These building contributions can be seen as expressing perhaps an act of Islamic hostility towards and/or domination over Christianity’s holiest site. Yet one could argue that these religious and architectural policies were in fact pursued as a result of anxiety over increased Islamic pilgrimage to Christian holy sites in the city. For example, Ibn Taymiyya clearly felt compelled to author his treatise as a result of an increase in Islamic pilgrimage to churches and other Christian sites in the Holy Land. Similarly, it could be argued that the Mamluk authorities built the Salahiyya minaret and the minaret of the Mosque of ‘Umar partly due to the increased number of Muslims visiting the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Were the authorities merely expressing Islamic domination over the Christian presence in the city, or was there perhaps tangible anxiety among the religious and political authorities over the flocking of Muslim pilgrims to the gates of the Christian martyrium? Were the two minarets built to remind Muslims who visited there every Easter, as Mujir al-Din informs us, of the importance and paramountcy of the Islamic faith, and thus compelling them to turn around and not enter the Church of the Holy Sepulchre? It is also interesting to note that the Sufi lodge al-Khanqa al-Salahiyya was also established immediately adjacent to the church, which would have further increased Muslim traffic around, and perhaps even inside, the church, thus perhaps further fueling the anxiety over an increased Muslim presence at Christianity’s holiest spot.

I have argued elsewhere that due to the scattering of many Islamic holy sites across Mamluk Jerusalem, along with the construction of many religious institutions and living quarters to accommodate the exponential growth of Muslim pilgrims and their worship, study, movement, and lodging throughout these places, the Islamic holy sphere in Mamluk Jerusalem diffused throughout the city – in the Haram, around it, deep within the confines of the urban fabric of the city, and even around and outside Jerusalem’s walls. Such diffusion of the Islamic religious sphere, I have stated, blurred the boundaries between the city’s sacred and secular quarters. One major consequence of this blurring of “liminal spaces” is that the Islamic religious sphere expanded over and overlapped with the Christian religious presence in the city. As this study has shown, the diffusion of the Islamic religious sphere can also be
seen through the many holy sites Muslims shared with Christians, a religiohistorical phenomenon that is only inevitable for a city so defined by its central role within the three monotheistic faiths as the city of Jerusalem. Demarcating where Muslims can worship and where they are prohibited from visiting becomes as impossible a task as separating exactly where in Jerusalem the sacred sphere ends and where the secular profane begins. Naturally, then, sharing sacred spaces among Muslims and Christians simply becomes an inescapable feature of Jerusalem and its past; it is hoped as well that this syncretic tradition can only continue today and in the immediate and distant future.

Fadi Ragheb served as assistant professor, Teaching Stream (C.L.T.A.), at the University of Toronto’s Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations, where he taught courses on Islamic history, classical Arabic, and modern Arabic. A recipient of Canadian federal, provincial, and university awards and scholarships, he has published studies on Mamluk Jerusalem, Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi, and the Crusades, and is currently completing a longer study on the history of Islamic pilgrimage to Mamluk Jerusalem during the era of the Crusades.

Endnotes
1 An earlier version of this paper was presented at the American Academy of Religion’s Annual Meeting in Denver, Colorado. I would like to thank the Institute for Palestine Studies, the jury members of the Jerusalem Quarterly’s Ibrahim Dakkak Award, and especially Alex Winder and Carol Khoury for their thoughtful feedback and editorial efforts on the article. I would also like to thank Eva Schubert and the Museum with No Frontiers for generously allowing me to reproduce images in this article from their excellent website, Discover Islamic Art. Many thanks also to Roberto Mazza for hosting me on his podcast Jerusalem Unplugged, where I discussed this article along with other aspects of my research on Islamic Jerusalem. Finally, I would like to dedicate this article to the memory of the late Jerusalemite Palestinian Kamil Jamil al-‘Asali, for his significant scholarly contributions to the study of Jerusalem, including his invaluable research on the Fada’il al-Quds specifically, and on medieval Islamic Jerusalem more generally, without which this study would not have been possible. May his spirit – and his writings – reverberate throughout our literary excavations of the history of al-Quds al-Sharif.


Winner of the 2023 Ibrahim Dakkak Award for Outstanding Essay on Jerusalem

7 On the connection in the Fada'il al-Quds
6 On biblical material in the Fada'il al-Quds

6 On biblical material in the Fada’il al-Quds, see Hirschberg, “Sources of Moslem Traditions”; Sharon, “Praises of Jerusalem.”


8 Elad, Medieval Jerusalem, 6–22.

9 See, for example, Livne-Kafri, “Jerusalem in Early Islam.”

10 Sivan, “Beginnings of the Fada’il al-Quds,” 267; Ragheb, “City as Liminal Space,” 80, 81–84.


10 Sivan, “Beginnings of the Fada’il al-Quds,” 267; Ragheb, “City as Liminal Space,” 80, 81–84.


12 On the early circulation and the writing down of the Fada’il al-Quds traditions, see Kister, “You Shall Only Set Out”; and Kister, “Comment on the Antiquity of Traditions.”

13 Recently, Suleiman Mourad reconstructed al-Ramlī’s work from later Fada’il al-Quds texts: Mourad, Fada’il al-Quds. See also Mourad, “Symbolism of Jerusalem in Early Islam.”


15 On the influence of the texts of al-Wasiti and Ibn al-Murajja on later authors during and after the Crusades, see al-‘Asali, Makhtutat, 28–29, 37; Ibrahim, Fada’il Bayt al-Maqdis, 161; Mourad, “Fada’il of Jerusalem,” 272–74. There are several theories on why the Fada’il al-Quds texts composed by al-Wasiti and Ibn al-Murajja emerged only during the eleventh century (fifth century AH). Sivan hypothesized that al-Wasiti (and Ibn al-Murajja) may have written his text as a result of – and in justification for – the persecutions of Christians by the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim and his destruction of the Holy Sepulchre: Sivan, “Beginnings of the Fada’il al-Quds,” 269–70. Hasson counters that one reason there were no Fada’il al-Quds works composed before the eleventh century was the lack of madrasas in the city and, more importantly, that the collapse of the larger dome of Qubbat al-Sakhra after the earthquake of 1016–17 (407 AH) led al-

These include Ba‘ith al-nufus ila ziyarat al-Quds al-mahrus by Burhan al-Din ibn al-Fikrāh al-Fazari (1262–1329/660–729 AH); Muthir al-Gharam ila Ziyarat al-Quds wa al-Sham by Shihab al-Din Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Hilal al-Maqdisi (d. 1363 AH); al-Rawd al-mugharras fi fada’il al-Bayt al-Muqaddas by Abu al-Nasr Taj al-Din ‘Abd al-Wahhab ibn al-Shafi‘i (d. 1475/880 AH); Shams al-Din al-Mustaqsa fi ta‘rikh al-Quds by Abu al-Nasr Taj al-Din ‘Abd al-Wahhab ibn al-Shafi‘i (d. 1475/880 AH) and Mujir al-Din al-Uns al-jalil bi-ta’rikh al-Quds wa al-Khalil (1496/901 AH).


Wasiti, in a “fund-raising campaign” style, to compose his tract to help collect funds to rebuild the damaged structure above the sakhrā: Hasson, “Muslim Literature in Praise of Jerusalem,” 173. I would posit that another major factor may have contributed to the composition of Fada’il al-Quds books by al-Wasiti and Ibn al-Murajja during the eleventh century (fifth century AH). In the history of medieval European pilgrimage, the eleventh century is considered, as Jonathan Sumption had elegantly put it, the “Great Age of Pilgrimage” to the Holy Land, when thousands of Europeans, including members of the ruling classes, undertook the long journey to Palestine to visit the Holy Land and pray at its Christian hallowed sites. It is possible that al-Wasiti and Ibn al-Murajja were motivated to compose their treatises on Jerusalem when witnessing the increased number of European Christian pilgrims descending onto their city. Their compositions were thus efforts to counter the heightened Christian presence in Jerusalem, providing an intellectual response to the influx of Christian pilgrims by renewing the Islamic sanctification of Bayt al-Maqdis in their texts. See Jonathan Sumption, Pilgrimage: An Image of Medieval Religion (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975), 114–45.


21 Shams al-Din al-Suyuti, like some other authors, composed his text during his visit to Jerusalem: see al-Suyuti, Ithaf al-akhkissa, I, 82–83.


26 Luz, “Sharing the Holy Land,” 44.


28 The word al-Sahira is cited in the Qur’an in verse 79:14 (fa-idha hum bi-al-Sahira).


31 On Islamic pilgrimage to the Tomb of the Virgin Mary and other Christian sacred spaces associated with Mary, see Moore, “Shared Sacred Spaces in the Holy Land.”


33 Al-Wasiti, Fada’il Bayt al-Maqrdis 49, no. 73 (all translations are mine unless stated otherwise); Ibn al-Murajja, Fada’il Bayt al-Maqrdis, 334; Ibn al-Jawzi, Fada’il al-Quds, 121; al-Suyuti, Ithaf al-akhkissa, I, 214, 238. The exact location of Mihrab Dawud differed across time during the medieval period, with some authors of the Fada’il al-Quds, such as al-Wasiti and Ibn al-Murajja, pointing to the Tower of David in Jerusalem’s citadel, while later Mamluk authors, such as Mujir al-Din, situating it on the Haram compound.

34 Albera, “Muslims at Marian Shrines,” 66.


37 Limor, “Sharing Sacred Space,” 227–29, and...
using Kedar’s typology to analyze the type and location of the shared sacred spaces here: Kedar, “Convergences.”


40 Mujir al-Din al-‘Ulaymi, al-UNS al-ja’il, I, 170.

41 See Pringle, Churches of the Crusader Kingdom, III, 287–306. For discussion of the Church of Holy Sepulchre, see below.


44 Mujir al-Din al-‘Ulaymi, al-UNS al-ja’il, I, 161.

45 On the Church of Saint Mary of Mount Sion, which also houses the Tomb of David and the Cenacle of the Last Supper, see Le Strange, Palestine under the Moslems, 212; Pringle, Churches of the Crusader Kingdom, III, 261–87. On sharing sacred spaces here at the Tomb of David, see Limor, “Sharing Sacred Space,” 223–27.

46 Mujir al-Din al-‘Ulaymi, Al-UNS al-ja’il, I, 117; see also Ibn al-Murajja, Fada’il Bayt al-Maqdis, 334.

47 Wa yuqal inna qabr Dawud alayhi al-salam bi-Kanisat Sahyun ... wa hiya al-lat’i bi-zahir al-Quds min jihat al-qibla wa fi Kanisat Sahyun al-madhkurra mawdi’ tu’azzimuhi al-Nasara ... wa hatha al-mawdi’ huwa al-an bi-aydi al-muslimin: Mujir al-Din al-‘Ulaymi, al-UNS al-ja’il, I, 117. On the Tomb of David and Church of Sion in medieval Arabic travelogues, see Le Strange, Palestine under the Moslems, 203, 212.


52 Ibn al-Murajja, Fada’il Bayt al-Maqdis, 97.


55 On the Spring (Pool) of Siloam, see Le Strange, Palestine under the Moslems, 74, 162, 179, 212, 220, 223; Elad, Medieval Jerusalem, 62–63, 68, 80–81, 133, 171.

56 Ibn al-Firkah, Ba’ith al-nufus, 23.


59 Al-Wasiti, Fada’il al-Bayt al-Muqaddas, 49, no. 73; Ibn al-Murajja, Fada’il Bayt al-Maqdis, 334; Ibn al-Jawzi, Fada’il al-Quds,
Winner of the 2023 Ibrahim Dakkak Award for Outstanding Essay on Jerusalem


61 Pringle, Churches of the Crusader Kingdom, III, 288. See also Eldad, Medieval Jerusalem, 138.


64 Wa idha hum bi-al-Sahira.


66 On the connection between the Mount of Olives and al-Sahira, and medieval authors’ different interpretations on the exact location of al-Sahira, see Eldad, Medieval Jerusalem, 141–44; Ragheb, “City as Liminal Space,” 87–89.

67 Wa la yadkhul al-kana’is wa la yasharti fiha bay’an fa-inna al-khati’ a fiha mithl alf khatt’a wa al-hasana mithl alf hasana: al-Wasiti, Fada’il al-Bayt al-Muqaddas, 13, no. 13; Ibn al-Murajja, Fada’il Bayt al-Maqdis, 341. See also, for the later period, al-Suyuti, Ithaf al-akhissa, I, 212.

68 For example, there are traditions in the Fada’il al-Quds that state that in Jerusalem itself good deeds and sins are multiplied: al-Wasiti, Fada’il al-Bayt al-Muqaddas, 24, no. 31; Ibn al-Murajja, Fada’il Bayt al-Maqdis, 295–97; Ibn al-Jawzi, Fada’il al-Quds, 91; Shihab al-Din al-Maqdisi, Muthir al-gharam, 205–7; al-Husayni al-Shafi’i, al-Rawd al-mugharras, 123–24; al-Suyuti, Ithaf al-akhissa, I, 143–44; Mujir al-Din al-‘Ulaymi, al-‘Uns al-jalil, I, 1, 230.

69 In Mecca, some Fada’il traditions also command that committing deeds in Islam’s holiest city has multiplicative consequences, including committing good deeds, sins, prayers, etc.; see, for example, the ahkam precepts and rulings manual of Abu Bakr b. Zayd al-Jura’i al-Salibi al-Hanbali (d. 1478/883 AH), Tuhfat al-raki’ wa-al-sajid bi-ahkam al-masajid, ed. Faysal Yusuf Ahmad al-‘Ali, 3rd ed. (al-Shamiyya, Kuwait: Lata’if, 2012), 155–56, 212–13.


72 Mourad, “Did the Crusades Change Jerusalem’s Religious Symbolism.”


74 Burgoyne, Mamluk Jerusalem, 33a–b; Frenkel, “Muslim Pilgrimage to Jerusalem,” 72–76; Ragheb, “City as Liminal Space,” 91–95.

75 Burgoyne, Mamluk Jerusalem, 61a–b; Anabti, “Popular Beliefs,” 61; Frenkel, “Muslim Pilgrimage to Jerusalem,” 70–72. On the increase in Muslim visitors from the Maghrib, see Yehoshua Frenkel, “Muslim Travellers to Bilad al-Sham (Syria and Palestine) from the Thirteenth to the Sixteenth Centuries: Maghribi Travel Accounts,” in Travellers in Deserts of the Levant: Voyagers and Visionaries, ed. Sarah Seary and Malcolm Wagstaff (Durham, UK: Astene, 2001), 109–20.

76 Mourad, “Did the Crusades Change Jerusalem’s Religious Symbolism.”

77 Mourad, “Did the Crusades Change Jerusalem’s Religious Symbolism.”


79 Wa yanbaghi idha kana fiha suwaran an
83 Al-Suyuti, Ithaf al-akhissa, I, 216 (wa qadiyyat tahririn dhukul Kanisat Bayt Lahm fa-huwa lima fiha min al-suwar).
84 Matthews, “Muslim Iconoclast.”
85 Matthews, “Muslim Iconoclast,” 7.
87 Al-‘Asali, Makhtutat, 6–9, 115ff. Al-‘Asali argues that by the sixteenth century (tenth century AH), which also coincided with the fall of Cyprus and the final end of the Crusader threat to the Muslim Near East, Fada’il al-Quds writings on Jerusalem reached the end of its peak and entered a phase of decline.
94 On the Church of St. Anne and its conversion to al-Madrasa al-Salahiya, see Pringle, Churches of the Crusader Kindgom, 142–56, especially 143.
95 Al-Luqaymi, Lata’if uns al-jalil, 166.
96 Al-Luqaymi, Lata’if uns al-jalil, 169–70.
97 Al-Luqaymi, Lata’if uns al-jalil, 170.
98 Al-Luqaymi, Lata’if uns al-jalil, 172.
100 Al-Luqaymi, Lata’if uns al-jalil, 201.
101 Al-Luqaymi, Lata’if uns al-jalil, 201.
103 Al-Luqaymi, Tahdhib mawanih al-uns, 168.
105 Al-Luqaymi, Tahdhib mawanih al-uns, 117.
110 Al-Miknasi, Ihraz al-mu’alla, 298–99, especially 299.
111 Al-Miknasi, Ihraz al-mu’alla, 301.
112 See, for example, Shihab al-Din al-Maqdisi, Muthir al-gharam, 151–53; al-Suyuti, Ithaf al-akhissa, I, 129; Mujir al-Din al-‘Ulaymi, al-UNS al-jalil, I, 257.
114 Al-Suyuti, Ithaf al-akhissa, I, 129; Mujir al-


117 Le Strange, “Notices,” 100.

